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ABSTRACT

This paper suggests that emerging adolescents in middle schools will do better in social studies if activities are encouraged that develop and maintain student interest. Goal centered, interesting learning opportunities are a must in the social studies curriculum. Middle school students need ample opportunities to engage in problem solving. Lifelike problems chosen by middle school students with teacher guidance emphasize interests of learners in ongoing lessons and units. Questions that might be raised by students after appropriate readiness activities in a unit on the Middle East are provided. Activities that produce learning opportunities through projects done in committees are encouraged. These include: (1) problem solving research in which problems are delineated, data researched, hypotheses formed and tested; (2) construction endeavors in which committees of students create outline and then relief maps of Palestine, a model wall of Old Jerusalem, the Jewish Wailing Wall, Muslim Dome of the Rock, and Christian Church of the Holy Sepulchre; and (3) art activities in which committees work in shifts on producing a mural by using a variety of art media. Interest is a powerful psychological factor in stimulating pupils to learn. To achieve the broad goal of developing interest in teaching-learning situations, middle school students need to achieve meaning in subject matter studied, purposes or reasons for learning, and experience that provides for individual differences. (DK)

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Interest, Social Studies, and the Emerging Adolescent

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INTEREST, SOCIAL STUDIES, AND THE EMERGING ADOLESCENT

How might the interests of emerging adolescents be secured in the middle school? Interest in learning provides for effort and diligence in goal attainment. The student and the social studies should become one, not separate entities. With interest in ongoing learning opportunities, each learner may attend to diverse activities and experiences provided. Goal centered, interesting learning opportunities are a must in the social studies curriculum.

Interest in Learning Opportunities

Middle school students need ample opportunities to engage in problem solving. Being able to identify and solve problems is useful in the social studies as well as in society. Life-like problems chosen by middle school students with teacher guidance emphasize interests of learners in ongoing lessons and units. With appropriate readiness activities in a unit on The Middle East, as an example, emerging adolescents may raise questions such as the following:

1. What can be done to solve the plight of 2.3 million Palestinian refugees?

2. How can a peace settlement be worked out between Israel and Syria over the Golan Heights area?
3. Why does Israel build Jewish settlements on the West Bank and the Gaza strip?
4. Why did Egypt and Israel agree to a peace settlement without the return of the Gaza strip to the former?

After problem areas have been clearly delineated, data sources need to be found. The basal textbook(s), supplementary texts, trade books, encyclopedias, journal articles, consultants, videw-tapes, video-disks, films, filmstrips, slides, pictures, and study prints, among others, might well provide needed information directly related to each identified problem. Answers secured must be directly related to any one problem. Adequate content needs to be sought. Critical and creative thinking are salient.

A hypothesis should result. The hypothesis is based on data gathered. Clarity of subject matter is important in the hypothesis. The hypothesis is tentative, not an absolute. Being tentative, the hypothesis is subject to testing. Further, detailed study is an excellent means of hypothesis testing. Again, a variety of related reference sources should be utilized to do the testing. The original hypothesis, as a result of testing, may then be modified, accepted, or refuted. New problems might arise at any flexible step of problem solving.

Each committee of middle school students should provide progress reports to others, as activities and experiences progress.

Group processes need evaluating within each committee in terms of members staying on the topic, respecting each others contributions, and emphasizing interaction rather than coaction. Many students enjoy and show interest in committee endeavors.

A second learning opportunity to emphasize is construction endeavors in the Middle East unit. The social studies teacher may develop much student interest by discussing selected illustrations with learners. One illustration might well emphasize the Judean Hills on a map of Palestine. Here, students have opportunities to view scenes of these hills. Ultimately, a committee can volunteer to make a relief map of Palestine on an outline map. Modeling materials, such as an equal mixture of flour and salt with enough water added to make a thick paste can be used to make the relief map. The mixture is then placed on the outline map of Palestine to show the Judean Hills. Other geographical features may be viewed from related reference sources so that Jericho (located 700 feet below sea level, the Dead Sea located 1,300 feet below sea level, and the Plain of Sharon located adjacent to the Mediterranean Sea) might also be put in relief form on the ouline map. Cities such as Jerusalem, Hebron, Bethlehem,

Samaria, Nazareth, Haifa, and Tele Aviv may be placed on the completed relief map using abstract symbols.

For a second committee of middle school student, a model walled city of Old Jerusalem may be constructed. The writer supervises many student teachers in public schools. One sixth grade student teacher stimulated pupils to construct a model wall around Old Jerusalem. There was much curiosity here in that learners viewed slides, filmstrips, pictures, and a video-tape on Old Jerusalem. Ultimately from cardboard, emerging adolescents made the wall.

Different gates of Old Jerusalem were also put into the wall. Damascus and Herod, as open gates, were cut into the side representing north on the cardboard box. The eternally closed Golden Gate was pictured with magic marker. Saint Stephen's, the lion gate, was cut out of the box. This gate is an opening through which people walk. The Golden Gate and Saint Stephen's Gate are located on the east wall surrounding Old Jerusalem.

A third committee constructed the Jewish Wailing Wall, also called the Western Wall, inside the walled city. Additional committees wished to construct the Dome of the Rock (a Moslem Mosque), and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, both located in the old city. Sixth grade pupils with student-teacher guidance were not only fascinated with the learn by doing approach, but also in securing information concerning these three structures. Each

committee reported on their model monument constructed. Excitement was great covering:

1. The Jewish Wailing Wall being the only remnant of the ancient Jewish temple.
2. The Dome of the Rock being the sight according to devout Moslem beliefs of Mohammed's ascension and descent from heaven.
3. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre being the place venerated by devout Christians as the burial place of Christ.

Interest in art activities was promoted by the middle grade student teacher in having one set of pupils volunteer to do a mural. The mural was developed by using a variety of art media. The Mosque of Abraham (located in Hebron) was drawn. Models for the mosque came from reading and non-reading materials. Pupils learned about the role of a minaret on the mosque as well as what was housed therein. A high degree of interest was shown when the committee reported on the tombs of Abraham and Sara, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Leah, as well as Esau being in the Mosque of Abraham.

A second committee pencil sketched scenes on:

1. The archeological dig at Jericho.
2. The Mount of Temptation overlooking Jericho.
3. The ruins of an Arab palace destroyed in Jericho by an earthquake in 769 A.D.

Dobkin, Fischer, Ludwig, and Koblinger[1] wrote the following criteria for a quality social studies program:

1. Development of critical thought.
2. Broad acceptance of, and respect for, other people's cultures.
3. Enlightened patriotism.
4. Good citizenship.

5. Knowledge of significant developments in human history.
6. Acquisition of fundamental skills.
7. Understanding of fundamental concepts.
8. Appreciation of the interrelationship of all disciplines.

In Closing

Interest is a powerful psychological factor in stimulating pupils to learn. A major goal in social studies units should be to develop interest in learning.

To achieve the broad goal of developing interest in teaching-learning situations, emerging adolescents may experience:

1. Problem solving activities.
2. Construction endeavors.
3. Art experiences.

Interest in social studies units emphasizes middle school students achieving meaning in subject matter studied, purposes or reasons for attaining, as well as experience provision for individual differences. Ozmon and Craver[2] wrote:

> Since pragmatists are concerned with teaching children how to solve problems, they feel that real-life situations encourage problem-solving ability in a practical setting. Let us suppose that in a particular class some children want to devise an energy allocation system. This becomes the problem, and children may study plans and decide how they want to go about solving. The motivation is there in student interest, and the teacher serves primarily as a resource person concerned with helping children to get the maximum educational advantages out of the situation. But, basically, the children do the work themselves, and they run into various problems about what kinds of

allocation schemes to use, how to construct an equitable allocation basis, what social and economic issues must be considered, what possible alternative energy sources may be tapped, or how modern society could conserve energy better. It is in tackling such problems and trying to provide solutions that children come to understand and control their own destinies better.

Selected References

1. Dobkin, William S., Joel Fischer. Bernard Ludwig, and Richard Koblinger. A Handbook for the Teaching of Social Studies second edition. Allyn and Bacon, Inc. 1985. Pages 2-3

2. Ozmon, Howard, and Samuel Craver. Philosophical Foundations of Education fourth edition. Merrill Publishing Company 1990. Page 141.